

THE COMING ECLIPSE.

There is to occur this year, on the 17th of August, one of the most imposing solar eclipses that an observer on this earth is in a position to behold. Remarkable phenomena of the kind have happened before, and will happen again; but this one possesses a special interest. There are partial eclipses and total eclipses; in some the totality lasts but a very few seconds, and the spectator has little time to study the startling phenomena that the occasion manifests; in others, however, the obscuration continues for several minutes, and good opportunity is afforded for observing and recording the attendant appearances. Now, in the eclipse in question the sun will be hidden for more than six minutes, nearly the maximum possible interval, and the astronomer will be on the spot with preparations for making the best use of this time in settling moot questions now existing, and in gaining new facts for the advancement of their comprehensive science.

One of the most interesting circumstances in the spectacle can only be witnessed in situations far removed from the great centres of European civilization; for the shadow path of the moon passes over India, the Malay Peninsula, and the oriental islands, and is just touching the southern limit of our continent. It is therefore impossible for our observers, which ample preparations have been made to occupy Scheuch's have been discussed, and the astronomer will be on the spot with preparations for making the best use of this time in settling moot questions now existing, and in gaining new facts for the advancement of their comprehensive science.

It is that the question, it is hoped, will receive at least a partial solution. All have by this time heard of spectrum analysis, the wonderful power by which the physical sciences, only with a wedge of glass, can tell us the source of that coming from sun from star, from comet, from nebula. Kirchhoff, the honored discoverer of this means of research, has told us that light is not refracted by an intensely heated atmosphere, charged with the vapors of metals and other ingredients which the prism has enabled him and others to sort and separate, and thus to identify with metals and inorganic substances to our globe. Are these red, cloud-like masses streaming apparently over the solar surface, aggregations of this vapor, flames of burning metals? Do they glow with their own incandescent light, or are they lit by the bright sea on which they float? Are they solid masses of matter, or are they attenuated gases? These are the points which it is hoped will be settled in whole or in part on the 17th of August on the hills of India. The observers will ply their polariscope to determine whether the light is genuine or reflected. Then they will pass their beams through the prism; if they see a long spectrum, colored with all the tints of the rainbow, they will know that they are looking upon masses of solid or liquid matter in combustion; if this spectrum is crossed by black lines, they will know that its light on its way to the earth has been intercepted by the vapors of certain metals and by certain gases, which they will recognize, by the positions of the lines; but, instead of the rainbow-tinted ribbon, they will only certain isolated bright lines, like colored threads stretched across the fields of their spectroscopes, they will know that they are looking upon materials so intensely heated that they have assumed the gaseous condition, and by the positions and colors of these threads of light they will be able to ascertain to some extent what these materials are. And what they will do for the red exhalations, they will endeavor to do also for the coronae, that they may learn something of the light which shines. So that the most important questions bearing upon the sun's constitution and structure are to be solved when he is out of sight! A strange anomaly, but nature is forever playing at hide-and-seek with us.

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